



Living Well

March is International Mirth Month

HAVE A GOOD LAUGH

"A person without a sense of humor is like a wagon without springs - jolted by every pebble in the road." Henry Ward Beecher

Laughter is the Best Medicine

Humor and laughter make a significant contribution to your physical, mental and work-related health. Just three to five minutes of intense laughter can double your heart rate and provide the aerobic equivalent to three strenuous minutes on a rowing machine. Laughter also has the ability to reduce physical pain. When we laugh, muscles are activated and when we stop, these muscles relax. Additionally when we laugh our brain releases endorphins which are nature's best built-in pain killer. Since muscle tension magnifies pain many people with chronic pain can benefit greatly from a healthy dose of laughter. There is clinical evidence that it can also mobilize our body's defenses and that when we smile it triggers chemical changes in the brain that make us measurably happier.

Using Humor in Conflict Management

In challenging situations, go for the jocular vein, not the jugular vein. Abraham Lincoln was known for his wit. When challenged to a duel he accepted under the condition that he pick the location and weapon. After the challenger accepted, Lincoln responded, "Cow dung at five feet." You can guess the result.

Humor can also assist in problem solving. One manager broke the tension at a confrontational meeting by arriving with a target pinned to his chest. The tension was reduced and the group was able to better resolve the problem.

Laughter is Contagious

During stressful times we often become surrounded by negativity. Humor can provide a healthy alternative. One company with chronic parking complaints put out a memo stating the following: "Employees whose cars stick out in traffic lanes will have their rear ends painted red. If they continue to park this way, we will do the same thing to their cars."

That's Not Funny

Not everything is funny. When the use of humor gets off balance it can become a source of irritation or conflict. Like any tool, you must recognize when it suits the task at hand. Humor can also be harmful if it comes at the expense of someone else. Sarcastic humor is intended to wound - superficially or deeply. Sarcasm is, therefore, anything *but* funny.

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Things to consider about sarcasm:

- According to Webster (the dictionary guy not Willis' brother) - sarcasm is a taunting or caustic remark.
- Humor which brings laughter at the expense of others doesn't bring people together - it drives them apart.
- Sarcasm is never, ever, ever, ever appropriate at work.
- Sarcasm is not humor - Sarcasm is mainly anger disguised in an attempt at humor.
- Unless everyone can laugh - it's not funny. Laughing "at" others only creates tension, hurt feelings and resentment. It is better to laugh at yourself or a shared experience. If you find yourself laughing at a situation of another - break the tension by sharing a similar type of experience. "I'm sorry I can't help but laugh - it reminds me of when I..."

Developing a Sense of Humor

Where does humor come from? Why do some people seem to make us laugh easily while others can never seem to remember the punch line to a simple joke? In order to understand your capacity for humor you must begin by reviewing your humor history. Did your family members and friends laugh easily and often? Our early experiences often send strong messages about humor. It is a valued personality trait or frivolous nonsense?

For more information about this topic, or any personal or workplace issue, contact SYMMETRY at (414) 256-4800 or (800) 236-7905 for confidential assistance.

Not everyone is a comedian but some people really struggle to embrace their humorous side. In a sense, they don't give themselves permission to be funny or to laugh in life. If this describes you, devote some time to exploring that which you find amusing. Make a point of appreciating the fact that it makes you feel good to laugh. After all, you can find the humor in almost anything if you're on the lookout for opportunities to laugh.

Examples:

- Sign at a laundromat - When the machine stops, remove all your clothing.
- Ad for a plumber - A flush beats a full house.
- Church announcement: This Easter Sunday we will ask Mrs. Johnson to come forward and lay an egg on the altar.
- Note to school from parent: My son is under doctors care and should not take fiscal ed. Please execute him.
- Ad in newspaper: Lost dog - brown, three legs, blind, one ear missing. Answers to the name Lucky.

Learn to laugh at what you do without laughing at who you are. This ability helps us keep things in perspective and helps us to let go of upsets, disappointments or frustrations before they become overwhelming.

